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A DEFENCE

OF THE

"Deliverance"

on Evolution,

ADOPTED BY THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

Presbyterian Church in the United States,

MAY 26TH, 1886.

BY

Geo. D. Armstrong, D. D., LL. D.

John D. Ghiselin,
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This Defence is, in substance, that made by the author when the matter was under discussion in the Assembly, at Augusta, Ga., May 24—26, 1886. "The Deliverance" was adopted by a vote of 137 to 13.

The "Deliverance" on Evolution.

The deliverance on the subject of the genetic evolution of man adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, at its session in Augusta, Ga., May 26th, 1886, is as follows, viz:

"The Church remains at this time sincerely convinced that the the Scriptures, as truly and authoritatively expounded in our confession of Faith and Catechisms, teach that Adam and Eve were created, body and soul, by immediate acts of Almighty power, thereby presecuring a perfect race unity.

"That Adam's body was directly fashioned by Almighty God, without any natural animal parentage of any kind, out of matter previously created of nothing.

"And that any doctrine at variance therewith is a dangerous error; inasmuch as by the method of interpreting Scripture it must demand, and in the consequences which by fair implication it will involve, it will lead to the denial of doctrines fundamental to the faith."

In considering this paper the first question which claims our attention is—

I.—IS THE MATTER COVERED BY THE PAPER PROPERLY, AND IN A CONSTITUTIONAL WAY, BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY?

In defining the powers of the General Assembly, our Constitution declares: "The General Assembly shall have power to receive and issue all appeals, references and complaints regularly brought before it from the inferior Courts; to bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in practice, injuriously affecting the Church; to decide in all controversies respecting doctrine and discipline; to give its advice and instruction, in conformity with the Constitution, and in all cases submitted to it, * * * * and, in general, to recommend measures for the promotion of charity, truth and holiness throughout all the churches under its care." (*Form of Gov., ch. v, sec. vi, art. 5.*)

1. To the present consideration of this matter the minority report objects that—"The answer which is invoked by these overtures, if granted, would violate our Constitution. (See *Con. of Faith, ch. xxxi, art. 4.*)" The article referred to reads: "Synods and Councils

are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical." At the same time, this minority report tells us that "before one of our lower courts a concrete case is pending involving the matter of these overtures," and concedes that when this matter comes up, by way of judicial appeal, it will be proper for the Assembly "to handle and conclude" it. To this, I answer: (1) The mere form in which a question comes up cannot affect its essential character. If this is an "ecclesiastical" question when it comes up in a judicial form, it must be equally "ecclesiastical" when it comes up by way of overture. (2) "The Form of Government" in the same sentence in which it gives the Assembly authority "to issue appeals," and so to decide questions of doctrine and morals involved in such appeals, gives it like authority "to bear testimony against errors in doctrine, and immorality in practice," when asked so to do, by any of the inferior Courts of the Church.

2. Should the Assembly decide this question in the form in which it is now before it, the decision thus reached will be a decision *in thesi* it is true. But such decisions, in so far as the settlement of doctrine for the Church at large is concerned, are of equal authority with judicial decisions. The paper on the subject, prepared by Dr. Woodrow and adopted by the Charleston Assembly in 1880, declares. "The *judicial* decisions of Courts differ from *in thesi* deliverances, in that the former *determine*, and when proceeding from the highest Court, *conclude* a particular case; but both these kinds of decisions are alike interpretations of the word by a Church Court, and both not only deserve high consideration, but both must be submitted to, unless contrary to the Constitution and the Word, as to which there is a right of private judgment belonging to every Church Court, and also to every individual church member." (*Assembly's Min. Vol. V. p. 202.*) With respect to the liberty of private judgment here claimed, I shall have something to say hereafter. I would now ask you to notice the fact that *judicial* decisions, and *in thesi* deliverances are placed upon the same footing in so far as the church at large is concerned—"both not only deserve high consideration, but both must be submitted to, unless contrary to the Constitution and the Word."

II.—THIS QUESTION IS BEFORE OUR CHURCH COURTS IN DIFFERENT FORMS.

The question concerning the genetic evolution of man is, at the present time, before our Church Courts in three different forms. It is before the Four Synods controlling Columbia Seminary, in the form of a question respecting the occupancy of the Perkin's Professorship of that Institution. It is before the Presbytery of Augusta in the form of a judicial prosecution recently instituted against the Rev. James Woodrow, D. D., and, it is before this Assembly by overture from several Presbyteries, asking a deliverance on the subject.

It has come up in all these different forms, because in different ways it is troubling the church.

1. It comes before this Assembly by overture, from eight different Presbyteries; and these widely scattered—one in Missouri, one in Texas and one in Virginia. There is not in the Synod of Virginia, in so far as I know, a single advocate of the doctrine, and yet, at its meeting last fall, so large a part of its time was taken up in the discussion "a complaint" originating in the doctrine, that the consideration of the more important business of the Synod was thrust into a corner. The Presbytery of Abingdon from which the complaint just referred to came, has had its time consumed and its patience sorely tried for two years, by having this question continually thrust upon it. I mention these facts to show you that it is not the Four Synods controlling Columbia Seminary, and Augusta Presbytery alone, which are troubled in this way, but that in the church at large it is a cause of disturbance; and so it has come about that overtures, asking for a deliverance by the General Assembly, the highest Court known to our Church, have come up to you from so many different Presbyteries. For the benefit of those who would hence infer the existence of a general drift in our Southern Presbyterian Church towards the doctrine of the genetic evolution of man; I would quote a remark of Dr. Hodge, respecting the Higher Critics, "a few frogs in a miasmatic swamp, make incomparably more noise than all the herds of cattle browsing upon a hundred hills."

2. To the objection to the present consideration of this matter by the Assembly: That a decision by the Assembly will affect the decision of it in its judicial form as it is now before Augusta Presbytery. I reply: Any effect which it may have, will be simply a moral effect, and in a case like the present, where a question is before three different Courts, its decision by any one of them must have a moral effect, on its decision by the other two. The overtures which bring it before us were adopted by the Presbyteries, before the judicial trial in Augusta Presbytery was begun, and so, of right should be first considered.

3. Of the two ways in which a question respecting doctrine can come before the Assembly for decision, viz: as involved in a judicial case, brought up by appeal, and as brought up by overture from the Presbyteries, the latter is, I think, greatly to be preferred to the former. When a doctrine comes up, as involved in a judicial case, there is always, more or less, matter foreign to the doctrine mingled with it; there are side issues of a personal character, which effectually prevent a clear and definite decision respecting the doctrine itself. The judicial case you decided on the day-before yesterday, as it originated in the Presbytery of Abingdon, was a question respecting doctrine: And, as it came before the Synod of Virginia last Fall, it still involved the question of doctrine to a certain extent. But, as it came before this body, the doctrinal element had dropped

entirely out; and all you decided was a question of constitutional law. For this reason it is, I suppose, that nine out of ten of the questions respecting doctrine and church order, which come before the Assembly come in the form of overtures, and not through judicial appeals. In the case before us, it is a matter of great importance that the decision should be clear and explicit, for such a decision, and such only will give peace to the Church. Hence, as I think, the question in the form in which it is now before us, is before us in the best form in which it could come up.

III.—QUESTIONS “ECCLESIASTICAL.”

Our Confession of Faith declares—“Synods and Councils are to handle and conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical, and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.” (*Con. of Faith, ch. xxxi: art. 4*). On this article, Shaw, in his Exposition of the Confession of Faith, writes: “While our Confession denounces any Erastian interference of the civil magistrate in matters purely spiritual and ecclesiastical, it no less explicitly disavows all Popish claims, on the part of the Synods and Councils of the Church, to intermeddle with civil affairs.” “Ecclesiastical” is here evidently used in opposition to “Civil”: and Ecclesiastical matters are such as properly belong to the Church to determine, as contradistinguished from those which properly belong to the State or Civil Government.

1. That the Westminster Assembly of Divines—the men who framed our Constitution, and prescribed the rule above cited—considered the question before us as properly “ecclesiastical,” is evident from the fact that they “handled and concluded” it when they wrote—“After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female; formed the body of man of the dust of the ground, and woman of the rib of the man; endowed them with living, reasonable and immortal souls,” &c. (*Larger Cat., art. 17*) And this conclusion, the Assembly which met in this house twenty-five years ago, and organized our branch of the Presbyterian Church, indorsed when they adopted the Confession of Faith and Catechisms as our Constitution. This truth the paper before us distinctly recognizes, and hence presents its conclusions, both in form and in fact as an exposition of a deliverance previously made. “The Church remains, at this time, sincerely convinced that the Scriptures are truly and authoritatively expounded in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms, teach” &c. The only fair and honest interpretation of a creed or a covenant—and our Confession of Faith and Catechisms are, for Presbyterians, both the one and the other—is in its “historic sense,” i. e. the sense in which they who framed it meant and

understood it. Thus interpreted, no one can reasonably doubt that the Westminster Divines, when they used the phrase "created man, male and female" meant, "created by immediate act of Almighty power," and not by any process of evolution from a previously existing brute.

2. The doctrine of the genetic evolution of man, as adopted and defended by its ablest advocates, is generally regarded as distinctly atheistic. At a meeting of the Nineteenth Century Club, in New York, May 25th, the venerable ex-President Porter, of Yale College, read an able paper on Evolution, in which he says—"Evolution is more than a scientific or philosophical question. Pushed to its logical outcome, it comprises therein, ethics, and all the sentiments from which our Christian civilization starts. It destroys the self-conscious agent, and substitutes for it blind materialism. Its logical outcome is mechanical atheism, unsettled morals, and denial of immortality or personality to man or God." (*New York Tribune of May 26th, 1886*). If this be at all a fair representation of the doctrine in question, surely, no thoughtful man can believe, that this General Assembly will be going beyond its proper sphere in condemning it.

IV.—A SCIENTIFIC QUESTION.

1. In making a revelation of religious truth in such a form as to be easily intelligible to man, especially the "common people," the Scriptures very wisely present us with—not a "Confession of Faith," nor a treatise on "Systematic Theology," but with that truth as it is incorporated in the history of the Church, and the life and experience of God's people in the world. The Bible contains very little didactic discussion, or logical exhibition of the truth it teaches, but is largely made up of history, the biographies of saints and sinners, of psalms, and proverbs and prophecies, and the story of the life and teachings of the God-man during his brief sojourn among men. Admitting, then, as every thoughtful man must, that there is no intention on the part of the sacred writers to teach us science, in the distinctive sense of that term, in the Scriptures; it will be seen at once that the Scriptures, on the one hand, and Geography, History, Ethnology, Archæology, Psychology, and even Geology, on the other, must often cover the same ground; and that on this common ground the Student of Scripture and the Scientist must meet, and examine the same subjects—deal with the same facts.

2. In seeking to ascertain the meaning of Scriptures, one of the most important canons of criticism to be kept in mind, is one based upon the fact, now universally admitted, that the Bible is written, not in the language of science, but in that of common life—it describes things, not necessarily as they are in themselves, but as they appear to the senses. It speaks of the sun's rising and setting,

although science has demonstrated beyond all reasonable question, that this rising and setting are apparent only, caused by a real motion of the earth upon its axes. This, which is the language of Scripture, is also the language of common life; even when great accuracy is desired, as in the laws of the land. Only a few years ago a law was enacted in Virginia, requiring that all saloons and other places where intoxicating liquors were sold, should be closed, "from sunset of the day preceding an election to sunrise of the day succeeding such election." Disregard of this obvious canon of interpretation led to the opposition of some eminent divines (e. g. Turretin) to the Copernican theory of the solar system, when proposed by Galileo some 300 years ago. And so in our day it has led Prof. Huxley to cavil at the statement in Gen. i. 21, in which "great whales" are classed among fishes, when science has demonstrated that they are mammals, and differ essentially in both structure and habits from fishes. Prof. Huxley, is undoubtedly right as to the scientific classification of whales. Nevertheless, whales will be fishes in the language of the common people, and even learned legislators will enact laws for the protection of "whale fisheries" as long as whales swim in the sea. When in Lev. xi. 19, the Bat is named among unclean fowls, the classification is not that of science—the Hebrew word *oph*, here translated fowl, means literally a flyer, and in several other places is translated *bird*—yet, doubtless, the Bat will be a bird in the language of common life, as long as it is seen to wing its way through the air of a summer evening.

3. Science, as presented to us in the writings of the ablest scientists of the day, consists of two distinct and easily separable portions—viz: (1) A mass of facts and phenomena carefully ascertained and classified, a number of particulars generalized, so as to be easily comprehended, and easily remembered, and (2) Certain conjectures, more or less probable, concerning the way in which these phenomena have been produced, and the facts have come to be facts. If these conjectures agree well with all the known facts in the case they are intended to cover, we give them the name of a theory; if they agree but imperfectly, we give them the name of an hypothesis. That the alternation of day and night, at any particular point on the earth's surface, is caused by that point being turned towards or away from the sun, is a fact in astronomy. That this change is owing to the revolution of the earth upon its axis is a theory, agreeing so well with all the known facts in the case, as to be accepted as true by all educated men—although the Rev. John Jasper, the Richmond divine of African descent, yet insists that "the sun do move." That the origination of the light and heat of the sun is to be traced, not to anything of the nature of a combustion of its material, but to its gradual contraction as it cools, is an hypothesis, adopted by some eminent astronomers, and rejected by others. This distinction between ascertained facts, and mere hypothesis is often

disregarded, and the same consideration and authority is claimed for the latter as for the former. Through disregard of this plain distinction scientists have not unfrequently assumed positions irreconcilable with Scripture, which they have subsequently been compelled to abandon. As instances in point, in our own day, I mention—the doctrine of a diversity of origin for the human race, in opposition to its unity as taught in Scripture; and, within the last few years—the doctrine of the “spontaneous generation,” as opposed to the doctrine that “life can come only from pre-existing animal life,” as taught in *Gen. 1: 11, 22, 28*.

4. The Scriptures and the doctrine of Genetic Evolution both cover the ground of the origin of the human race.

(1.) The immediate creation of man, God has seen fit to make a matter of express revelation. So the Westminster Divines understood when they framed Answer 17 of the Larger Catechism, and supported every separate clause of it, by the quotation of Scripture proof. So Dr. Woodrow admits in so far as man’s soul is concerned, and woman, body and soul, when he writes “as regards the soul of man, which bears God’s image, and which differs so entirely, not merely in degree but in kind from anything in the animals, I believe that it was immediately created,” and he has before stated that *immediate creation* is the proper opposite of *creation by evolution*—“that we are so taught. So, in the circumstantial account of the creation of the first woman, there are what seem to me insurmountable obstacles, in the way of applying the doctrine of descent.” (*S. Presbyterian Review*, 1884, p. 356.) So, even Prof. Huxley admits when he writes: “The cosmogony of the semi-barbarous Hebrews is, even at this day, regarded by nine-tenths of the civilized world as the authoritative standard of facts, and the criterion of the justice of scientific conclusions in all that relates to the origin of things, and, among them, of species. (*Lay Sermons*, p. 178.)

(2.) Science, in so far as it covers the ground of the origin of man, is not—science in the sense of facts and phenomena carefully ascertained and classified, nor science in the sense of theory, generally accepted as true by educated men, but science in the sense of an hypothesis, unproved, according to the confession of its advocates; and declared to have no scientific basis by such scientists as the Duke of Argyll, Virchow, Principal Dawson, and Mr. Etheridge of the British Museum. The era of creation is passed. God ended the work with the creation of man. Creation then, as to its mode, can never become a subject of direct investigation. The only sure information respecting it within our reach is that afforded by revelation. Besides this, the doctrine of creation as set forth in Scripture is undoubtedly a religious doctrine, inasmuch as it ascertains to us, who is author of our being, and of the world in which we live, and therefore the proper object of our reverence and worship.

(2)

The ground covered by the paper under discussion, properly belongs to the church. Dr. Woodrow has expressly admitted that "if anything touches the truth of the Word of God, it is *ecclesiastical*, and a proper subject for this Assembly to handle." That scientists, in the future as in the past, will push their hypothesis into this field, I have no doubt,—and that some timid souls forgetting the distinction between scientific facts and scientific hypothesis, will be inclined to yield the field to them is very probable. But so long as God has covered it with his revelation, the church, if faithful to her trust, can never surrender it. What we have to complain of in this our day, is not the church making deliverances on matters scientific, but certain scientists undertaking to make deliverances on matters "*ecclesiastical*."

V.—WHAT IS GENETIC EVOLUTION.

Dr. Woodrow complains that this whole subject is generally misunderstood;—and as illustrating this, he quotes from my "Nature and Revelation collated," p. 47, the remark, that evolution is "an hypothesis which postulates, the transformation of an oak, not immediately, but by successive variations, into a silk-worm, a silk-worm into a frog, and a frog into a man,"—and adds, "I never saw any one who came within a thousand miles of believing such a caricature. If this profound student of half a century errs thus in representing evolution, what can we expect from those who have had no such opportunity for study?" Have I, indeed, grossly misrepresented the hypothesis of Evolution? Listen to Prof. Huxley, *facile princeps* among the advocates of the doctrine, "If the doctrine of evolution be true, it follows that, however diverse the different groups of animals and of plants may be, they must all, at one time or other, have been connected by gradational forms; so that from the highest animals, whatever they may be, down to the lowest speck of protoplasmic matter in which life can be manifested, a series of gradations, leading from one end of the series to the other, either exists or has existed. Undoubtedly this is a *necessary postulate* of the doctrine of evolution." (*New York Lectures on Evolution, Lect. II*). Surely the oak, the silk-worm, and the frog will come in somewhere in a gradational series beginning with "the lowest speck of protoplasmic matter in which life can be manifested, and ending with the highest animal"—man.

Why is it that Evolutionists object so strongly to every attempt to give their hypothesis a concrete form,—a form in which the common people can understand it, and cling so persistently to statements in general terms, *e. g.* "The transformation by successive differentiations of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous,"—"descent with modifications?" Darwin, in so far as, I know, is the only one who has even ventured to give us the evolutionary geneol-

ogy of man. Huxley went one step backward; from man to some anthropoid ape; but there stops, and in apparent perplexity exclaims—"There is no one who estimates more highly than I do, the dignity of human nature, and the width of the gulf in intellectual and moral matters, which lies between man, and the whole of the lower creation." (*Huxley's Origin of Species, Lect. vi.*) Darwin alone pushed on, and tells us,—“Man is descended from a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in its habits, and an inhabitant of the Old World. This creature, if its whole structure had been examined by a naturalist, would have been classed among the quadrumana, as surely as would the common and more ancient of the New World monkeys. The quadrumana and all the higher mammals are probably derived from an ancient marsupial.” The only marsupial common in our country is the opossum—“and this through a long line, either from some reptile-like or some amphibian-like creature, and this again from some fish-like animal. In the dim obscurity of the past we can see that the progenitor of all the vertebrates must have been an aquatic animal, provided with branchiæ.” *i. e.* gills, “with the two sexes united in the same individual, and with the most important organs of the body, such as the brain and heart imperfectly developed. This animal seems to have been more like the larvæ of our existing ascidians”—sea-squirts, as they are more commonly called—“than any other known form.” (*Descent of Man, Vol. ii, p. 372.*) The one who believes in this outline of man’s genealogy, will hardly find himself a thousand miles off, from the one who accepted my “oak, and silk-worm, and frog, and man.” And yet, this is a representation of Evolution, from the hand of Charles Darwin, the father of it in its modern form. Why is it that neither Spencer, nor Grant Allen, nor any other of the numerous disciples of Darwin who have written books upon the subject, has even attempted to complete this outline genealogy? Is it because this hypothesis when bodied in particular forms startles them? That like Falstaff with the company he had pressed in the king’s service, they are ready to exclaim: “If I be not ashamed of my soldiers I am ashamed of my gurnet—No eye hath seen such scare-crows. I’ll not march through Coventry with them, that’s flat.”

VI.—ORGANIC DUST.

The Scriptures declare that “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul,”—literally “an animal of life, or living animal.” Gen. ii. 7.

1. The attempt has been made to reconcile this account of man’s creation with the doctrine of evolution by supposing the “dust” here spoken of is “organic dust.” Dust is “earth or other matter

reduced to a dry powder, earthy substance, anything pulverized," (*Worcester*); and organic dust must be vegetable or animal matter reduced to a dry powder. In the only form in which we are acquainted with it, it is the *soil* of the farmer, the *humus* of the chemist. Thus understanding the term, I see no objection to considering the dust spoken of in Gen. ii. 7, as organic dust. The vegetable and animal creation had been in existence probably for ages, before man was brought into being, and many generations of plants and animals must have lived, died and gradually decayed, leaving their organic dust upon the surface of the mineral earth then as now. The district of Eden in which God "planted a garden," doubtless had a soil. The similarity in ultimate composition between the body of man, and that of plants and animals would seem to render such a supposition altogether probable. It is Dr. Watts, and not Moses, who says God "formed us of *clay* and made us men."

Evolution is defined by Darwin, as "descent with modifications," and Dr. Woodrow accepts this definition. Descent as predicated of an animal implies birth, and birth implies life in both parent and offspring. But organic dust is a dead thing, and therefore incapable of generating naturally a living progeny. Suppose I take the finest Jersey Cow in the country and reduce her to organic dust, i. e., let her die, and her partially decomposed body assume the form of a dry powder,—what will you give me for the improved calf which shall be the evolute of this organic dust?

Dr. Woodrow says: "The majority report affirms that this pair were created without any natural animal parentage. How do they know this? They were created, it is said, from dust. How long had this dust been created? Some will answer that it was created a few days before. Others, that it was created ages—long geological ages—before. Now, what changes occurred in those ages? You do not know. * * * Who was Adam? Was Adam that which was made of the dust of the ground in the image of God? No; the soul was the man, and nothing became man until it was united with the soul; and if there had been a million of forms like Adam's, it did not become man or Adam until God placed the soul in it." (*Quoted from the Augusta Chronicle of May 25th.*) I am not certain that I understand Dr. Woodrow here—and I should be sorry to misrepresent him—but, if this be plain English, it seems to me clearly to admit, what I have affirmed above, that in "descent with modifications" there is necessarily implied life on the part of the parent; and to meet this necessity, he supposes there may have been millions of living forms—anthropoid apes, for example—one of which, by the impartation of a soul, became Adam. And, so *organic dust* in his use of the term, means the living body of an animal, moist with blood and other fluids, and presenting no symptom of decay. Such

juggling with words as this cannot be allowed in dealing with the Scriptures.

VII.—THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

The paper before you condemns the doctrine of the genetic evolution of man, on the ground that it contradicts "the Scriptures as truly and authoritatively expounded in the Confession of Faith and Catechism." That such is the fact, if our standards are to be interpreted in their historic sense, *i. e.*, in the sense in which their authors understood them, has not been called in question. Nor has the other truth, affirmed in styling these documents an *authoritative* expositions of Scripture for us, that they are "accepted by the Presbyterian Church in the United States, or standard expositions of the teachings of Scripture in relation to both faith and practice" (*Discipline, chap. iii, art. 1*) been denied. But the question has been asked: Is there no liberty allowed a minister in the Presbyterian Church; must all adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechism in every particular, and *ipsissimis verbis*? To these questions I answer: There is a certain liberty allowed, and the nature and extent of that liberty are defined by the Standards themselves.

1. "All synods and councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred." (*Con. of Faith, ch. xxxi, art. 3*). And the Westminster Assembly which framed our Confession of Faith and Catechisms is one of these councils. We therefore do not claim for our Standards a right "to bind the conscience." Such authority would imply their inspiration. For Presbyterians, there is but one inspired book, and that is the Bible.

2. "An offence, the proper object of judicial process, is anything in the principles or practice of a church member professing faith in Christ, which is contrary to the Word of God. The Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechism, of the Westminster Assembly, together with the formularies of government, discipline, and worship, are accepted by the Presbyterian Church in the United States, as standard expositions of the teachings of Scripture, in relation to both faith and practice. Nothing, therefore, ought to be considered by any court as an offence; or admitted as a matter of accusation, which cannot be proved to be such from Scripture, as interpreted in these Standards. (*Discipline, ch. iii, art. 1*). Whilst, then, we do not claim for our Standards authority to bind the conscience, an authority which belongs to the Word of God alone, we do accept them as an authoritative exposition of the Scriptures, and as such, of ultimate authority—authority beyond which there is no appeal—in the actual administration of the government of the Church.

3. Ministers, and the same is true of Ruling Elders and Deacons,

are required at their ordination to answer in the affirmative the question—"Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." (*Form of Gov., ch. vi, sec. iv, art. 2.*) We do not adopt our Standards *ipsissimis verbis*, but only "as containing *the system of doctrine* taught in the Holy Scriptures."

4. Offences are either errors in practice, *i. e.* immoralities, or error in faith, *i. e.* heresies. Respecting the latter our Standards declare—"Heresy and Schism may be of such a nature, as to warrant deposition; but errors ought to be carefully considered, whether they strike at the vitals of religion and are industriously spread, or whether they arise from the weakness of the human understanding, and are not likely to do much injury." (*Discipline, ch. viii, art. 5.*) In order to establish the charge of heresy against a Presbyterian minister, it is not enough to show that he holds, and even teaches, some doctrine erroneous according to our Standards. It must be further shown that his error "strikes at the vitals of religion," or "is likely to do much injury"; and on these points the proper Courts of the Church must decide.

In accordance with these principles the government of our Church has always been administered; her officers ordained and admonished, suspended or deposed. Our Confession of Faith up to the present meeting of the Assembly, at which a change has been consummated, has declared the marriage of a man to his deceased wife's sister, incestuous. For one, from the time I first examined the subject, I have never believed that this was the doctrine of Scripture. I have always respected it as a part of our constitution; but on the floor of Presbytery, and through the press I have advocated the change which has now been made, and the liberty I have thus asserted has never been called in question. In the common judgment of the Church the error was one which "did not touch the vitals of religion," or "which was likely to do much harm." Our Shorter Catechisms affirms that "the work of creation is God's making all things of nothing by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good," (Ans. 9.) Interpreting these words in their historic sense, there can be no doubt that the six days here spoken of must be understood to be six natural days of 24 hours each. When, many years ago I was examined for ordination, by Lexington Presbytery, I stated to Presbytery that I could not accept this statement as true. Yet, Presbytery, on the ground that my error—and certainly it was an error according to our Standards—"did not strike at the vitals of religion," nor was it "likely to do much harm," proceeded to ordain me; and I have been in good standing in the ministry ever since. I mention my own case in these instances, not because it is singular; but because it is not singular, and because these instances

illustrate the degree of liberty allowed in the Presbyterian Church, and the constitutional limitations of that liberty.

VIII.—A DANGEROUS ERROR.

The paper before us closes with the statement that the doctrine of the genetic evolution of man "is a dangerous error; inasmuch as by the method of interpreting Scripture it demands, and in the consequences which by fair implication it involves, it leads to the denial of doctrines fundamental to the faith."

1. Our Standards nowhere give a formal definition of the term inspiration; but the Confession of Faith declares that "all the books of the Old and New Testaments are given by inspiration of God, to be the rules of faith and life," and, "the authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God." (*Con. of Faith, ch. i, secs. 2, 4.*) And in proof of these declarations such Scriptures as the following are quoted, viz: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son." *Heb. i. 1, 2.* "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." *2 Pet. i. 21.* "When ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the Word of God." *1 Thess. ii. 13.* After all the learned attempts, made in modern times, to define Inspiration, I do not know of any better than that my mother gave me when a child standing at her knee, she taught me to call the Scriptures the Word of God.

The difficulties encountered in attempting to reconcile the genetic evolution of man with the account of his creation, given us in Genesis, has led most of those who have adopted the doctrine, either, to reject the divine authority of the Scriptures altogether, or else, to adopt such views of inspiration as to leave them no longer, in any proper sense of the expression, the Word of God. Charles Darwin never adopted the doctrine in its confessedly atheistic form; but held that evolution was simply "a mode of creation." Judging from the tone and spirit of his earliest published work—"The Voyage of a Naturalist"—he started in life, not only a theist, but with a christian faith. A short time before his death he wrote—"As far as I am concerned, I do not believe that any revelation has ever been made." (*Letter to a Student at Jena, quoted in Christian Thought, Vol. I, p. 100.*) Prof. Drummond, in his "Natural Law in the Spiritual World," written but a few years ago, whilst evidently an evolutionist, seems to regard the Scriptures as inspired, in the orthodox sense of that word. If such were then his sentiments he must have

drifted rapidly; for in his late paper in the Gladstone-Huxley controversy, he deals with the first chapters of Genesis as nothing better than a mythological poem. His words are—"Genesis is a presentation of one or two great elementary truths to the childhood of the world"; and, as illustrating what he means by this, he quotes George McDonald's "Baby's Catechism,"

"Where did you come from, baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into the here.
Where did you get your eyes so blue?
Out of the skies as I came through.
Where did you get that little tear?
I found it waiting when I got here.
Where did you get that pearly ear?
God spoke, and it came out here;
How did they all just come to be you?
God thought about me, and so I grew."

And he adds "for its purpose, what could be finer or even a more true account of the matter than this; without a word of literal truth in it, it would convey to the child's mind exactly the right impression." (*Popular Science Monthly* for April, 1886, p. 109.)

The paper before you, does not affirm that all who adopt the doctrine it condemns must of necessity give up their faith in the inspiration of Scripture, but that such is the natural and I would say the logical tendency thereof. I do not doubt the truth of Dr. Woodrow's statement, when he says: "There is no human being living who believes more fully than I do in the plenary inspiration of every word of the Scriptures." But we must remember that it was only a few years ago, according to his own statement, that he adopted this doctrine, and that in a modified form. He was then a man of mature age, and by careful study, firmly established in the faith, and he may be able to hold on to that faith to the end in spite of the strong drift which has swept others away. But that such is not likely to be the case with the young man, whose faith is yet in a formative state if he adopts the doctrine, such examples as those quoted above clearly show.

(2.) Among the "doctrines fundamental to the faith," which the genetic evolution of man, "by fair implication," denies, is the doctrine of "the fall." The Shorter Catechism, after stating that "God created man, male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures" (*Ans.* 10) adds: "Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God." (*Ans.* 12) and "The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was eating the forbidden fruit." (*Ans.* 15.)

The doctrine of the fall as here set forth takes for granted the historic character of the first chapters of Genesis. To me the Gar-

den of Eden is as real as the city of Jerusalem: "The tree of the knowledge of good and evil," is as truly a tree as one of the cedars of Lebanon. That the plucking and eating of the fruit of that tree, first by Eve, and afterwards by Adam, took place just as related by Moses, I believe just as surely as I believe that the Disciples of our Lord, on a certain occasion, "plucked the ears of corn and did eat," as related in Luke vi. 1. The fall, consisting in the loss of man's original righteousness and the corruption of his whole nature, commonly called original sin" is no myth or fable: and one proof of this is, that according to Moses' history, original sin speedily manifested itself in Adam, in one of the meanest ways in which it has been cropping out ever since, viz: in leading him when charged with a fault which he could not deny, to try and lay the blame on his wife. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." *Gen. iii. 12.*

If man has been evolved from some anthropoid ape, in what condition must he have commenced his life as man in the world? Among scientists in so far as I know, there has never been but one answer given to this question. Man, the evolute, must begin his course on earth, in the lowest condition, physically, mentally, morally, in which it is possible for humanity to exist—the condition of the "cave dweller," the "Paleolithic man." Hence it is that scientists are accustomed to quote all the evidence they collect of the existence of the Paleolithic man naked, and living upon the fruits of the earth, or the raw flesh of such animals as he could entrap or overpower in fight, as just so much proof of the doctrine of evolution as applied to man. If man first appeared in this miserable condition, already as low down as humanity can exist, how can he suffer further degradations? He is at the bottom of the scale; how can he fall. That which is possible in the case of "Adam which was the son of God," (Luke iii. 38), is impossible in the case of Adam Bar—Simia, (the son of an ape).

I.—THE LANGUAGE OF THE PAPER.

A few words respecting the language of this paper, and I have done. (1.) The term evolution is not anywhere used, and its use is avoided of purpose; for to the disgrace of our modern science it has come to cover all sorts of meanings. As Dr. McCosh has truly said, evolution is like the "great sheet" which Peter saw—"knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" (2). "Adam and Eve were created, body and soul, by immediate acts of Almighty power." Dr. Woodrow has asked—"What do you mean by immediate?" and Dr. Smoot has well answered by quoting from Dr. Woodrow's Columbia address, in which he puts immediate

(3)

creation over against mediate creation or evolution ; treating the one as exclusive of the other. (3). " thus preserving a perfect race unity." By this we mean that the first marriage, solemnized by God himself, was not a misalliance; that there was no more ape-blood in Adam's veins than there was in Eve's. The language of the paper is not the language of science, but the language of common life. It is a definite, clear-cut answer to the overtures sent up to this Assembly; one which people will understand; and one which I trust will give peace to our Church.

